



BALKAN WATCH

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A Review of Current Events

MACEDONIANS REJECT NATIONALIST REFERENDUM. Macedonians declined to support a November 7 referendum intended by its hardline nationalist backers to block legislation implementing key portions of the 2001 Ohrid Peace Agreement that averted a civil war between ethnic Macedonians and Albanians. Less than 50 percent of Macedonia's 1.7 million eligible voters cast ballots, thus invalidating the electoral initiative. The legislation at stake in the referendum, which passed the legislature in August, changed the number of municipal districts from 123 to 84 and redrew boundaries to give Albanian Macedonians a majority in 16 of them, an increase from the less than one dozen districts where they were a majority previously. The law would give ethnic Albanians improved status closer to a full partnership with the ethnic Macedonian majority. The legislation, which has not yet taken effect, was challenged by extreme nationalist ethnic Macedonians, who demanded a nationwide popular vote on the law prior to its implementation. Macedonia's president and prime minister had called for defeat of the referendum, ethnic Albanians largely boycotted it, and Western capitals had warned that passage of the referendum could spark renewed fighting in the country and urged all Macedonians to boycott the voting.

Officials in neighboring Albania had expressed concern that the referendum to deny ethnic Macedonia's ethnic Albanians greater autonomy could destabilize the region if approved. Albanian Prime Minister Fatos Nano had urged Albanians in his own country and Macedonia to distance themselves from extremist elements, which could undertake acts of violence.

U.S. RECOGNIZES MACEDONIA BY ITS CHOSEN NAME. In an effort to deflate support among ethnic Macedonians for extreme nationalists prior to the November 7 referendum, the U.S. announced on November 4 its decision to recognize Macedonia by its chosen name of "Macedonia," rather than the "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia," which Greece had insisted on and to which the international community had largely deferred. The Macedonian president immediately went on national television to welcome the U.S. move as a breakthrough for his country and pledged that Skopje remained committed to building friendly relations with neighboring Greece.

KOSOVO VOTE COUNT. The final results of the October 23 parliamentary elections were announced by the Central Election Commission on November 3: LDK—47 seats (45.4 percent of the vote), PDK—30 seats (28.9 percent), AAK—9 seats (8.4 percent), ORA—7 seats (6.2 percent), and four minor Kosovo Albanian parties won at total of five seats. The ten seats set aside for Kosovo Serbs were divided among the Serbian List for Kosovo and Metohija (8 seats) and the Citizens' Initiative Serbia (2 seats). The major Kosovo Serb political parties

boycotted the elections in response to direction from Belgrade, especially Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica to do so and in defiance of President Boris Tadic and the international community. Turnout was less than one percent of eligible Serb voters. Talks are now underway among key Kosovo Albanian political leaders to form a broad-based coalition government that would include representatives of the major Albanian parties.

KOSOVO FINAL STATUS DEBATED BY SERBIAN LEADERS. Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica has called for decentralization talks regarding Kosovo. Kostunica would like to achieve a "compromise solution" that would allow for "institutional guarantees" to protect the Serbian minority in the disputed province. Many observers view decentralization as a fig leaf for partition of Kosovo. Kostunica's call for talks came after the boycott of October elections in Kosovo.

Meanwhile, former Prime Minister Zoran Zivkovic, who succeeded the assassinated Zoran Djindjic, publicly asserted on November 5 that independence for Kosovo was a "done deal" and said that "the effort to create a multi-ethnic society now after all the conflict, bombing, and war crimes is definitely a mission impossible." He added, however, that he expected Kosovo to be partitioned as the price of independence, with a portion of the north retained by Serbia and small enclaves of Serbs in various parts of Kosovo abandoned to the Albanians. He described any plan that excluded Kosovo's independence as a waste of time that would only delay the inevitable agreement on Kosovo's independence. Zivkovic's comments mark a breaking of the taboo among Serbian political leaders in terms of public acceptance of the inevitability of Kosovo's independence.

FORMER SERBIAN INTERIOR MINISTER ACKNOWLEDGES MASS GRAVES. Dusan Mihajlovic acknowledged the existence of 17 mass graves in Serbia holding Kosovo Albanian victims from the war in Kosovo. Mihajlovic said that the government led by Prime Minister Kostunica has been reluctant to prosecute those responsible for the mass graves. Former Serbian acting president, Natasa Mivic, also acknowledged the existence of mass graves in Kosovo.

TADIC IMPEACHMENT MOTION REJECTED. A motion by ultra-nationalist members of the Serbian parliament to impeach Serbian President Boris Tadic was rejected. Members of the Radical Party announced they thought that Tadic's support of Serbian participation in the October 23 elections in Kosovo was unconstitutional. The motion was rejected by a vote of 127-99. After its rejection, Radical Party members walked out of parliament.

ASHDOWN WARNS BOSNIAN SERBS.

High Representative Paddy Ashdown warned Bosnian Serb officials to step up efforts to capture wanted war crimes suspects. Ashdown accused Bosnian Serb officials of failing to cooperate with international authorities searching for inditees including Bosnian Serb wartime military leader Ratko Mladic and political leader Radovan Karadzic. Bosnian Serb non-cooperation has hindered Bosnian chances of joining international groupings such as NATO's Partnership for Peace, from which Bosnia was rejected earlier this year. Bosnia will have another chance at potential Partnership membership in December; however, Ashdown's remarks indicate that acceptance into the organization is unlikely in the near future.

MILOSEVIC ALLOWED TO REPRESENT SELF. Former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic was given the right to represent himself again in his war crimes trial at The Hague. The appeals court which heard his case decided that Milosevic would be allowed to direct his own defense; however, the court also ruled that he must retain lawyers appointed by the tribunal to assist him in conducting his own defense. Steven Kay and Gillian Higgins were appointed by the tribunal on September 2 to represent Milosevic, whose trial faced persistent delays due to his alleged hypertension. The appeals judges noted that if Milosevic is sick and unable to direct his trial on a given day, his lawyers will be able to manage that day's work. Prior to the appeals court decision, Kay and Higgins had asked to be dismissed from the case, because of Milosevic's hostility and unwillingness to cooperate with them. They will now be expected to stay with the case and Milosevic expected to cooperate with them. The trial is set to resume on November 9.

QUOTABLE QUOTES:

"If you're going to express your support for the path that the Macedonian government has chosen, it's a good time to express it before a referendum that could potentially undercut that path."—Senior State Department official, commenting on U.S. recognition of Macedonia's legal name (*Reuters*, 11/4/04).

"Today is a great day for Macedonia and all Macedonians wherever they are."—Macedonian President Branko Crvenkovski, on U.S. recognition of Macedonia's legal name (*Reuters*, 11/4/04).

"This job has now got to be done. No ifs, no buts, no more excuses."—Bosnia's High Representative Paddy Ashdown, warning Bosnian Serb authorities to track down war criminals (*DPA*, 11/2/04).

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